

# Opinion

EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



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## Get the lead out

The following editorial is written by Bob Slate, city editor for the Granite City Press-Record.

Last week, more than five years after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency chose a cleanup plan for decades-old lead contamination in Granite City, Madison, Venice and Eagle Park Acres, the U.S. EPA changed its plan.

The initial cleanup plan was announced in 1990 — more than seven years after residential soil contamination was discovered.

The plan covers three distinct levels of contamination: residential soil in about 1,600 yards, a 290,000-ton lead waste pile at 15th and State streets; and remote alleys and driveways where material from the waste pile was used as fill.

In its initial plan, EPA proposed removing all residential soil with a lead concentration of 500 or more parts per million, placing it on the pile and capping the pile with fresh dirt and grass.

Under the recently announced change, EPA will have the residential soil hauled to a landfill — where it belongs — rather than adding it to the existing pile.

To its credit, the EPA has spent about \$15 million to clean up the remote fill areas and plans to pave over any remaining areas of this type.

But EPA still refuses to budge on the issue of the pile, and Granite City has joined a federal lawsuit challenging the cleanup plan. The lawsuit was filed by the companies EPA deems responsible for contamination. Those companies have already spent millions of dollars researching cleanup alternatives.

The issues surrounding the cleanup plan can get complicated. Health studies have been done and all parties have presented experts debating the levels of contamination that warrant cleanup. Does the lead present a significant health risk for humans, especially children? Are there other factors, such as lead-based paint in homes, contributing to blood-lead levels? Will recontamination occur after the residential soil is removed?

It is easy to get so caught up in the details of the debate that the broader issue of the cleanup gets lost. It is easy to forget that very basic rule: the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.

One needs only to stand at the corner of 15th and State streets and look west to put the matter back in perspective. There stands the biggest — and best — argument to get the lead out of the city.

The lead pile stands over an aquifer that feeds the Mississippi River. While EPA initially failed to find any groundwater contamination below the pile, EPA officials have since admitted that their test methods were flawed and water contamination below the pile is a significant health hazard.

And on hot, dry summer days, material from the pile can be seen blowing all over the area. Although EPA insists this is not the case, one needs only to see it with one's own eyes to realize that the EPA's methods are again flawed.

So why would EPA propose leaving the pile — with lead concentrations in excess of more than 300,000 parts per million — yet removing soil from all yards that have lead concentrations of 500 parts per million or more?

Why would EPA refuse to address the issue of lead paint? Isn't it much more accessible to children than the lead in dirt?

This issue has been debated to death. It has been at the forefront of public attention for more than a decade. The time for action passed long ago.

Please, EPA: get the lead out.

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## More smoking

When I completed my Army service in 1953, I decided to permanently swear off two habits, swearing and smoking.

Cigarette smoke is even deadlier for nonsmokers than for smokers, so I try to go to no-smoking areas in restaurants and other public places.

I have no wish or right to dictate what other people do, but I would prefer that everyone consider resisting the "peer pressure" and addiction, and give up smoking, for their own good.

Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely that this will happen.

However, President Bill Clinton does plan a "tough and mandatory" approach to discourage smoking by teenagers.

He proposes to ban cigarette vending machines at places



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rible things to one's including such tragic lung cancer.

The American Medical Association (AMA) spoke summer, urging federalization of tobacco as a drug.

The AMA simultaneously published once-secret documents, revealing schemes to hide the damage

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